

# THE Unexplained

## MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

**The Elixir of Life**

**What killed the mammoths?**

**French timeslips analysed**

**The case of 'Mary Celeste'**

**Money pit mystery**

# 48



# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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## In next week's issue

In the first of a new series, **Kaspar Hauser**, we describe how a teenage boy with no experience of civilisation stumbled into the German city of Nuremberg and created a sensation that was to last some five years. Why do animals often seem to act for the good of others – often at considerable risk to themselves? Find out in **Strange nature**. The mystery of why all kinds of vehicles are affected when UFOs are nearby is discussed in **UFOs/Vehicle interference**. And captured on camera in **UFO Photo File** are more sightings from Spain, the Canary Islands and the USA. Continuing our series **Mammoths**, we try to discover how these creatures died and investigate the possibility of their survival. We end with **Hypnosis** and the ways in which we can control our own health and well-being by auto-suggestion – do-it-yourself hypnotherapy.

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# Why did the mammoths disappear?

**Ever since the discovery of the first complete mammoth carcase in 1799, one question has haunted the minds of scientists: why, 12,000 years ago, did the entire species suddenly become extinct? FRANK SMYTH investigates**

THE ARCTIC, THE FROZEN LID of the world, is one of the Earth's last truly mysterious places. Oceanographers and geologists have barely begun to plumb its strange depths, and the ice, the sea and the coastlines that border it are still sources of controversy.

One of its more curious features is the 'permafrost' belt, which runs around the coastline of the Laptev Sea of northern Siberia to Alaska and then across Canada to the edge of Hudson's Bay. The permafrost has been described as frozen muck – a kind of soup consisting of sand, pebbles, shells, vegetable matter and the semi-decomposed remains of millions of animals ranging in size from small rodents through sabre-toothed tigers to musk oxen and, largest of all,

A typical tundra landscape. It is in such areas that, buried in the frozen layer or *permafrost*, most mammoth remains have been found. Often they are astonishingly well-preserved – like this one (inset), found in 1860

mammoths, elephants of the arctic.

All these relics are of interest to zoologists, but it is the woolly mammoth, known to science as *Mammuthus primogenius*, that has caught the attention of laymen, for although it became extinct as a species at least 12,000 years ago, pieces of mammoth carcasses, largely preserved by the permafrost, have been uncovered at fairly regular intervals during the past two centuries. How these animals existed in these harsh regions, and exactly how and why they died are questions that have caused violent altercations in the pages of scientific journals ever since the late 19th century.

Like many facts about these huge animals, the date of their appearance on Earth is uncertain, but it is known that they thrived during the Pleistocene epoch, which began about two and a half million years ago and ended around 10,000 years before Christ. They formed one of at least three genera of the *Elephantidae* family – the present-day



## Mammoths

elephants of Africa and Asia are other members – that coexisted at this time.

*Mammuthus meridionalis* appears to have had his origins in Europe and Asia and may have evolved into the modern elephant, while *Mammuthus imperator* thrived for several thousands of years in Canada and Alaska before becoming extinct. The longest lasting pure genus was the woolly mammoth, whose fossilised bones have been found as far from its natural habitat as Wyoming and Lake Michigan; despite these wanderings, however, it was mainly to be found in northern Russia, particularly in Siberia, where at any one time an estimated 50,000 mammoths roamed in ponderous herds, searching perpetually for the massive daily intake of food necessary to sustain them.

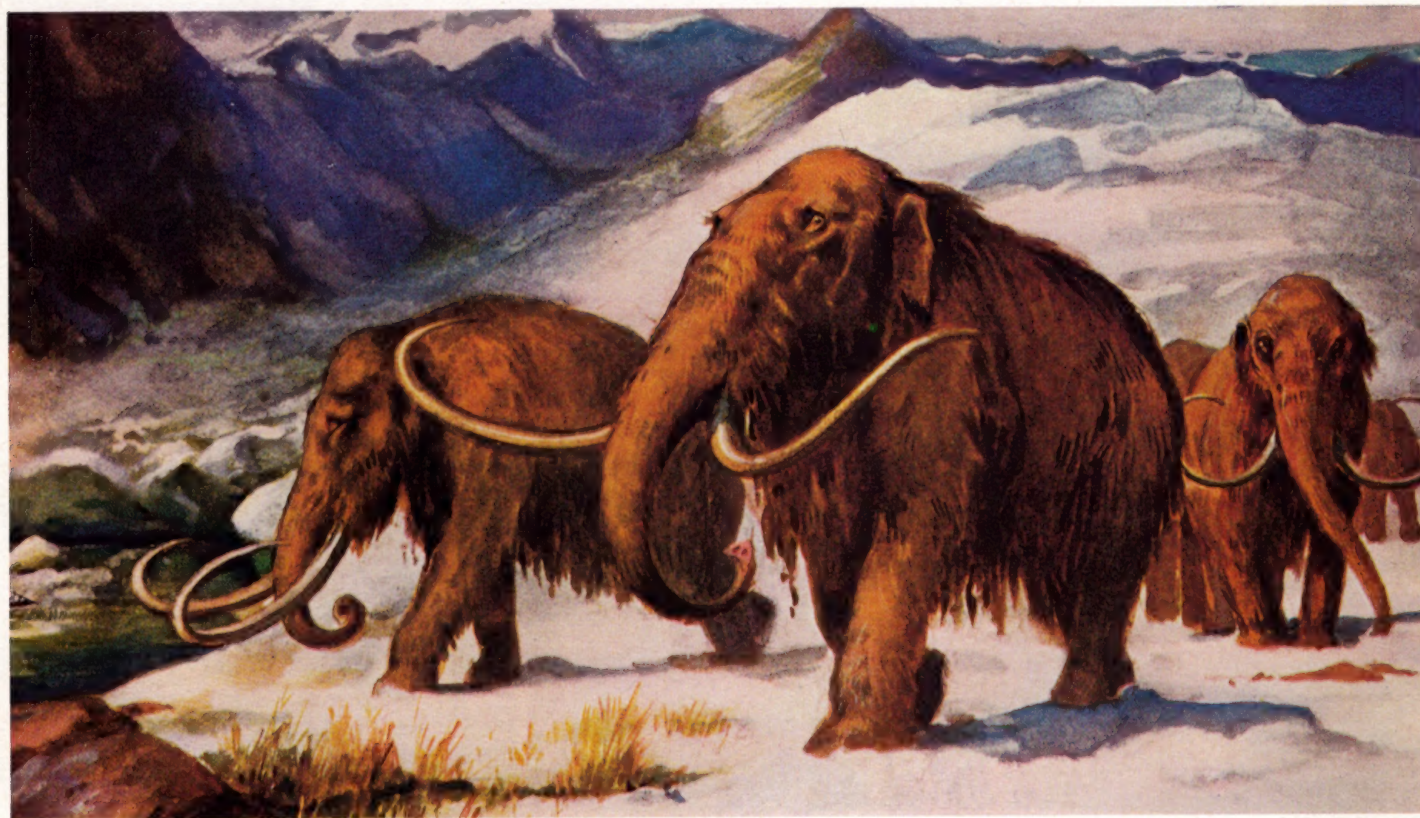
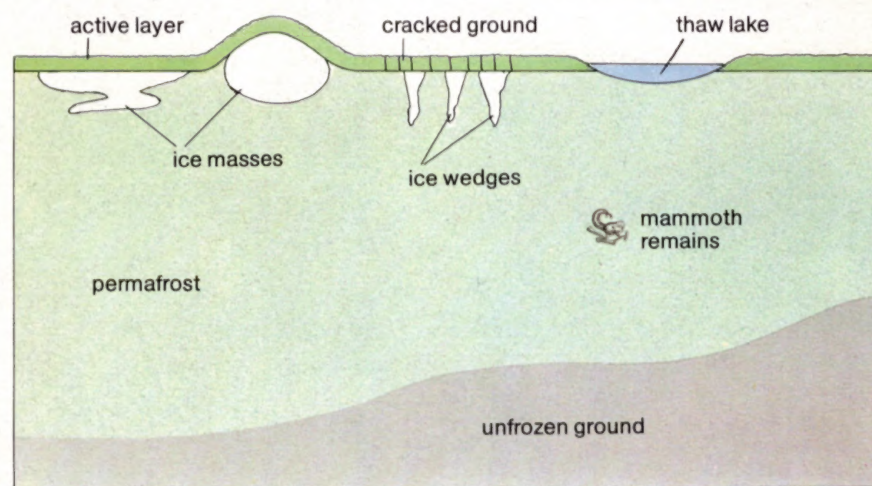
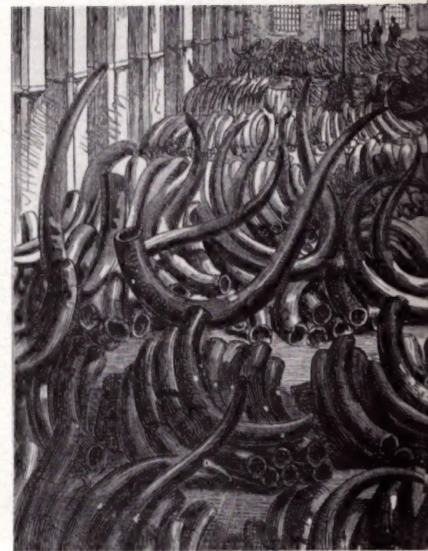
### Treasure in the ice

The few relics of the mammoth found in North America were of the 'normal' pre-historic type: incomplete skeletal remains in various states of fossilisation and deterioration. But the remains found in Siberia were in a different condition; they were frozen, so that the ivory of the giant tusks, some of them up to 15 feet (5 metres) long, was in perfect condition to be worked into ornaments, sword handles, utensils and similar artefacts.

There is evidence that the Chinese and Mongolians knew of these underground deposits of ivory at least 2000 years ago. By the 13th and 14th centuries, Arab traders were converging on Russia to buy the huge tusks, and a thriving trade had developed within Russia itself. By the 16th century, with the spread of popularity of billiards – Mary

Queen of Scots, for instance, was an ardent player – the raw material, which the Russians termed *mamontova-kosty*, or 'mammoth ivory', was part of business deals between England, France, and St Petersburg (now Leningrad), centre of the commerce.

Interestingly, no one knows the origin of the word 'mammoth', although the Siberians themselves used the word *mammat* very early. A possible explanation was that it was a mispronunciation of the word 'behemoth' from the book of Job. Nor did its early discoverers question the origin of the strange and beautiful substance that they quarried from the permafrost, although the general belief was that it came from the teeth of a giant rat that lived deep underground and came to the surface to die. Superstition surrounded the creature, whatever it was, and most Russian traders went in fear of





Mammoth ivory has been big business ever since the medieval period. By the 19th century, there were regular shipments to the major European ports; the illustration (left), dated 1873, shows a consignment on the ivory floor of the London docks. Right up until the 1930s, Siberian tribesmen supplemented their living by excavating mammoth tusks (below)



Left: a simplified diagram of the soil layers of the Siberian tundra. Beneath the so-called 'active layer' – which is rarely more than 6 feet (2 metres) deep and freezes and thaws every year – is the permafrost. This can be anything up to 1000 feet (300 metres) deep, and consists of shells, pebbles and sand, and the semi-decomposed carcasses of millions of animals – including mammoths

Below left: an artist's impression of Siberian, or woolly, mammoths. Scientists believe that their curving tusks were used as snow-ploughs, to clear away the snow and ice and uncover the vegetation that lay below

Right: a Cro-Magnon drawing of a mammoth from the Rouffignac Cave, Dordogne, France, showing the massive forequarters and shaggy hide typical of the mammoth carcasses that have been found in Siberia



finding a live one, for to look upon it was to bring a death curse upon oneself. The great skulls and long bones lent credence to the theory, prevalent throughout Christian Eurasia during the medieval period, that these were the remains of giants that had roamed the Earth before the Flood – evil semi-humans left behind by Noah when he loaded up the Ark.

The first person to connect the Siberian mammoth with the modern elephant was a Dutch diplomat named Evert Ysbrandt Ides who in 1692 travelled to China on an errand for Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia. While there he heard from the Chinese and Mongols stories of the mammoths, including tales of whole carcasses having been found frozen. Ides published a highly popular book that set out to prove that the remains were those of an elephant that had lived, as he put it, 'before the Deluge'.

Peter the Great was fascinated by the possibility that some of these great 'elephants' might still be alive in a remote part of his domain. The possibility seemed to be borne out by the story told to him by Michael Wolochowicz, a Siberian explorer who said that he had seen the body of one thawing on the banks of the Indigirka River on the shores of the Arctic in eastern Siberia. Unfortunately, wolves had begun to eat the body, so that there was not much left except the skeleton. However, Wolochowicz averred, 'I saw a piece of skin putrefied, appearing out of a sand-hill, which was pretty large, thick-set and brown, somewhat resembling goat's hair; which skin I could not take for that of a goat, but of a behemoth, inasmuch as

## Mammoths

I could not appropriate it to any animal that I knew.'

It was left to a traveller named Khariton Laptev, writing in 1743, to suggest that the animals were ancient, preserved by a deep-freeze process:

'On the banks of several rivers in the tundra, whole mammoths with their tusks are dug out with hides on them. Their hair and bodies are, however, rotten, while the bones, except the tusks, are also decaying.'

Throughout the 18th century zoologists speculated and theorised about the Siberian mammoths, and then in August 1799 an almost complete specimen was found in the delta of the Lena River, the first to be scientifically studied. An ivory hunter named Shumakov, who was also a chief of the Tungus tribe, which held the mammoth in superstitious awe, saw a dark shape in a massive block of ice. The following year he passed by again. The block had melted somewhat and he was able to trace the outline of what looked like a huge animal. When he again returned to the spot in 1801 the ice had melted, exposing one side of the animal. Shumakov was terrified: he had looked on a mammoth, and he must surely die.

In fact, he *did* fall ill – but to his astonishment he recovered. As he later explained, if he had survived the first sighting, why should he not go back and claim the tusks? His superstition cured, he returned to the site in 1803, to find the beast fully exposed, with the surrounding ice completely melted. Again his nerve failed him, but he told his 'middle-man', an ivory dealer named Roman Boltunov, and the latter persuaded him to show the carcass. Boltunov removed the tusks but made a detailed drawing, which he

Below: a modern African elephant. Instead of the warm hair and tiny ears of the mammoth, designed to retain heat, the African elephant has a smooth skin and enormous ears, designed to disperse its body heat

Bottom: a map showing the principal finds of mammoth remains since the late 18th century. All the better-preserved examples were excavated in the permafrost region of Siberia

sent to Professor Mikhail Ivanovich Adams, at the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg.

Realising the importance of the find, Professor Adams set out with an expedition to recover as much of the body as remained. The exposed side had largely been eaten by wolves, and the trunk and one foreleg were gone. But the skull was still intact and skin-covered, along with one ear and the left eye, plus much of the brain. The unexposed side was almost complete, with the shaggy hide lying under the body.

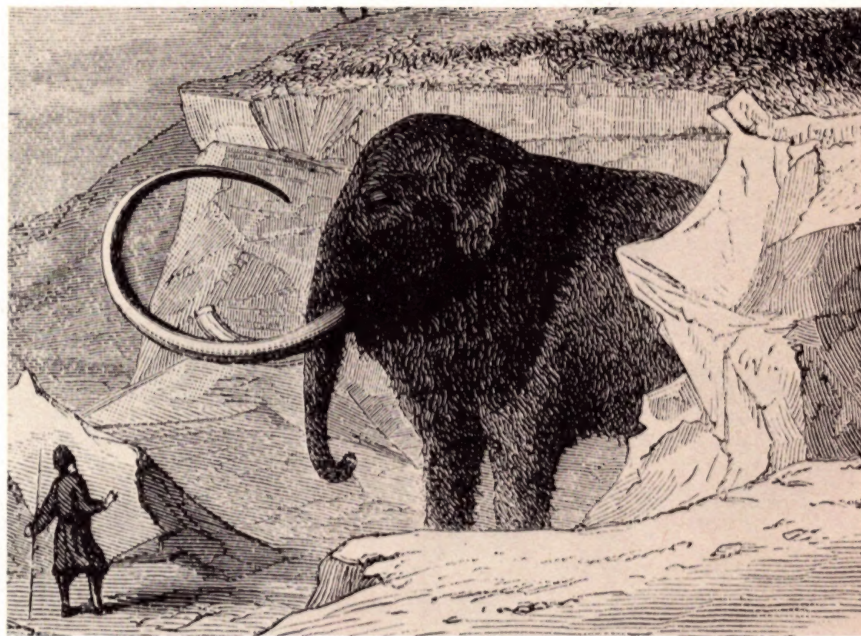
Carefully, Adams dismembered the corpse in order to send it back to St Petersburg. The hide alone took 10 men to lift it, and the reddish hair, which fell off and was gathered up separately for crating, weighed 37 pounds (17 kilograms). Adams finally bought back the mammoth's tusks from Boltunov and the remains were sent back and reassembled in St Petersburg.

Adams's painstaking work had solved the problem of what, exactly, the animals in the



ice were, but it raised other questions. Why had the creatures died out? Were they, in fact, extinct? It seemed unlikely that a body could be in such a relatively fresh looking condition if it had really died 'before the Deluge'. Almost a century was to pass before the discovery of the most perfect specimen yet known indicated the probable cause of death of at least some of these mighty creatures.

In August 1900 a party of hunters noticed that a landslip had occurred on the banks of the Berezovka River, a tributary of the Kolyma in the then Government (or province) of Yakutsk, northern Siberia. Protruding from the frozen gravel were the head and shoulders of a mammoth. The hunters took a tusk before reporting the find to the Governor of Yakutsk, who set a guard on the dead animal before informing the scientists in St Petersburg. An expedition under Professor Otto Hertz, head of the Department of Zoology of the Russian Academy of Sciences – although he himself was a specialist in insects – got under way. With him Hertz brought a geologist and a leading taxidermist. After an epic journey on foot and horseback lasting several months the party found the mammoth. Apart from some damage caused to the skin of the head and one foreleg by wild animals, it was still intact, frozen into the permafrost in what had been a deep ravine. Chipping at the frozen muck with special steel tools designed for the job, the experts gradually freed the corpse from its ages-old tomb. Their main problem was the 'unbearable' stench from the onset of putrefaction once a hut was built over the site to give the workmen heat and shelter. Despite this, the taxidermist dissected the



Above: an artist's highly romanticised impression of the discovery, in 1799, of a frozen woolly mammoth carcass by a Siberian ivory hunter. The remains later became the subject of the first scientific investigation of mammoths

Below: the Berezovka mammoth, discovered in 1900. Its mouth contained grass, unswallowed when sudden death overtook it. How did it die?



mammoth, carefully preserving the skin whole, and sealing the soft organs in special containers for later examination. When the taxidermist began to cut away the skin from the hind legs, however, he found dark red meat resembling that of a well-hung haunch of beef. Hertz reported that he and his men were tempted to try cooking steaks of it, but could not bring themselves to sample it. Instead it was fed to the sled dogs.

The body was that of a young male – it stood 8 feet 10 inches (2.7 metres) tall at the shoulder, compared with the 10 feet 8 inches (3.2 metres) of Adams's specimen. Its hind legs were doubled under the body and the pelvis was broken, along with the right foreleg. The hide was half to three quarters of an inch (1 to 2 centimetres) thick, and was covered with two layers of hair; the 'undercoat' was yellowish grey and about an inch (2.5 centimetres) long, and this was topped by a matted red coat between 4 and 6 inches (10 and 15 centimetres) long. Beneath the hide was a layer of fat averaging 4 inches (10 centimetres) in depth, though a larger bulge of fat on the shoulders and head gave it the characteristic hump of the Cro-Magnon drawings. Many years later, Carbon 14 dating processes were to indicate that both the Berezovka mammoth and that found by Adams died around 30,000 years ago.

A curious fact about the Berezovka mammoth was that its mouth contained buttercups and grass, which it had for some reason been unable to swallow. This indicated that the creature met a sudden death. And an analysis of the contents of its stomach revealed that the mammoth's diet consisted of plants that still grow in the area. Which raises a fascinating question: could there still be mammoths in Siberia?

*More mammoth remains – and sightings of live mammoths. See page 974*



Left: one of Harold Wilkins's alleged Kidd-Palmer charts, dated 1669, showing an unidentified island that is remarkably similar to Oak Island. Captain Kidd was hanged in 1701 (right), and subsequently became the arch-pirate of popular imagination; this illustration (below) depicts him supervising the burial of treasure in a cave. Many people believed it was Kidd's legendary hoard that lay hidden in the Money Pit



## So near, yet so far

**Who was the engineering genius behind the Money Pit? What did he bury there – and why? After years of investigation all hope of solving the mystery was abandoned. But, as EDWARD HORTON reveals, there was one vital clue that everyone had overlooked**

FROM THE MOMENT that Daniel McGinnis chanced upon the Money Pit in 1795 to the present day, attempts to salvage the supposed treasure have naturally gone hand in hand with speculation about the identity of those who buried it. There has been no shortage of candidates, from a tribe of Incas to a party of Norsemen. Dottiest of all, surely, is the theory that the Money Pit conceals manuscripts of Francis Bacon's that reveal his authorship of Shakespeare's plays. All along, however, the popular favourites for the role have been pirates – either pirates unknown or one particularly well-known pirate, Captain William Kidd.

This is hardly surprising, given the romantic association between pirates and buried treasure. And while, generally speaking, the pirate connection has been regarded as self-evident, there is at least one small piece of circumstantial evidence that appears to confirm such a suspicion. The oft-mentioned coconut fibre (if it was correctly identified) presumably came from the West or East

Indies, notorious haunts of pirates and buccaneers. Nova Scotia is far from the beaten track of piracy, but there is certainly no reason why some of the English mauraunders who preyed so successfully on Spanish ships and towns in the Caribbean during the middle part of the 17th century, the notorious 'brethren of the coast', should not have made their way up the Atlantic coast.

It is an attractive theory that conjures up visions of pieces of eight, a frenzy of moonlit activity by desperate men with the sea at their backs, blood on their hands and avarice in their hearts. But it founders on the question of dates. It will be recalled that McGinnis found a clearing with young oaks springing up to replace those that had been felled. The red oaks of the North American and Canadian coast grow quickly, and McGinnis would have found mature trees towering above him, not saplings, had the Money Pit been dug a century and more before.

The identification of the pirate in question as Captain Kidd presents difficulties too. He

As the units of measurement used in early records of excavations at the Money Pit were Imperial, in this article the original measurements have not been converted into metric equivalents. The following conversion chart may be helpful.

1 inch = 2.5 centimetres  
10 inches = 25 centimetres  
1 foot = 30 centimetres  
10 feet = 3 metres  
100 feet = 30 metres  
1 mile = 1.6 kilometres

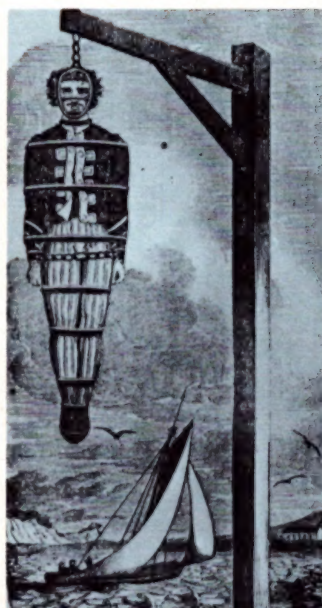
was hanged for piracy at Wapping in 1701 and has subsequently been popularly associated with practically every tale of buried treasure that has ever been told. Nevertheless, Kidd and the mysterious Oak Island brush against each other in a strange way.

In 1935 a book entitled *Captain Kidd and his Skeleton Island* appeared in England. It included a map of an island and a set of directions. The map was based, according to the author of the book, Harold T. Wilkins, on the famous Kidd charts, which had recently come into the hands of a collector of pirate relics, Hubert Palmer. The charts, four of them, had been found hidden in three sea chests and an oak bureau – apparently genuine Kidd relics. All depict an unidentified island in greater or lesser detail, and they contain various markings and inscriptions (not all of them identical, although the island is always the same), including the initials W.K., the location 'China Sea' and the date 1669. These Kidd-Palmer charts, as they are known, were accepted by experts as being genuine 17th-century documents.

There are striking similarities between the island depicted in these charts and Oak Island, despite the 'China Sea' location. It has been suggested, incidentally, that the latter is both a red herring and, rather whimsically, a pun on *la chène*, French for 'oak'. These similarities almost leaped off the page at Gilbert Hedden, who came across Wilkins's book as he was mounting his campaign on Oak Island in 1937. And Wilkins's drawing, apparently based on the original charts, contained these clear directions:

18 W and by 7 E on Rock  
30 SW 14 N Tree  
7 by 8 by 4

Hedden set out on a determined exploration of the area around the Money Pit with Wilkins's book open in his hands. Fifty feet



Below: this map, from Harold Wilkins's book *Captain Kidd and his Skeleton Island*, convinced prospector Gilbert Hedden that Skeleton Island was in fact Oak Island, and that there was indeed an immense treasure buried there. But the map came from Wilkins's imagination, and it bears little resemblance to any of the genuine Kidd-Palmer charts

north he came upon a large granite boulder with a hole drilled in it. When he told Frederick Blair of this, the old campaigner was reminded of a similar stone that he and his associates had come across 40 years earlier, down at Smith's Cove. The two men found the stone, similarly drilled, and paced out the distance between the two, which was approximately 140 yards. In an attempt to relate this distance to the information contained in Wilkins's book ('18 W and by 7 E'), they estimated that they had paced 25 rods (1 rod is 16½ feet).

Then two land surveyors were called in, who calculated a position 18 rods from the rock by the Money Pit and 7 rods from the one at Smith's Cove. From that point they measured 30 rods south-west, following the directions in the chart. And there, beneath tangled undergrowth, they found a triangle of beach stones, each side of which was 10 feet long; its base was enclosed in an arc, giving the appearance of a rough sextant. An arrow of stones ran 14 feet from the curved base of the triangle to its apex. The arrow pointed north, straight at the Money Pit. Hedden and Blair could make no sense of the third line of instructions, but they had seen enough to convince them that Captain Kidd's island and Oak Island were undoubtedly one and the same.

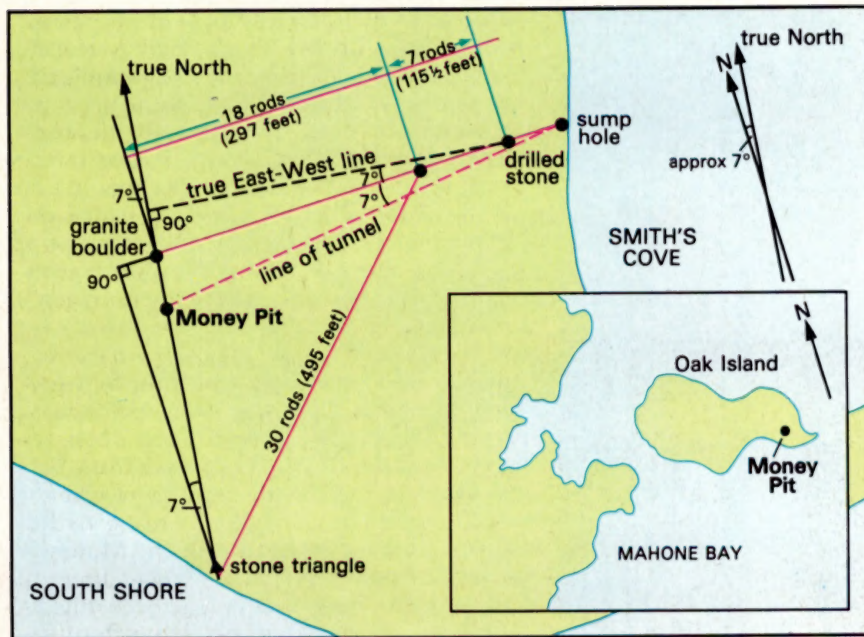
### A mythical island

So persuaded was Hedden by this discovery that he journeyed to England to discuss it with Wilkins. Wilkins was flabbergasted. He explained that he had drawn the map from memory, that it was a composite of the four Kidd-Palmer charts that Palmer had only allowed him to glimpse, that he had had no chance to make a note of the directions that two of the charts contained. So where had Wilkins got those directions he published with his drawing – directions that had led Hedden to his discovery on Oak Island? The author was adamant: he had simply made them up. When pressed further by Hedden, Wilkins confessed that the map itself had come straight from his imagination too – that Palmer had refused his request for a sight of the original charts. As for Oak Island, he had never heard of it, had never seen its outline, had never in fact crossed the Atlantic. Yet he had to concede that his mythical island did indeed look like Oak Island, and that Hedden had proved that those fanciful directions did indeed correspond to something very real. By the time Hedden left England to return to Oak Island, Wilkins appeared to have convinced himself that he was no less than the reincarnation of Captain Kidd.

Hedden went away shaking his head in bewilderment, which is all anyone could do about this aspect of the Oak Island mystery until the answer to the Wilkins enigma was provided by Rupert Furneaux, in his book *Money Pit, the mystery of Oak Island* (1972). Furneaux discovered that Wilkins had lied to



## Oak Island Money Pit



Hedden. Wilkins had in fact been corresponding with a Nova Scotian, who in 1912 had chanced upon a box containing charts among a pile of stones on an island 15 miles (24 kilometres) north of Mahone Bay. Those charts are now lost or hidden, but someone who had seen them was able to draw for Furneaux, from memory, the mystery island depicted in the charts, complete with directions. Moreover, in the charts the island was named Gloucester Isle, which, Furneaux had already discovered, was the name given to Oak Island when Mahone Bay was charted by the British Admiralty hydrographer, Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres, in 1773. The Des Barres charts of various parts of the Atlantic coast were not printed until later that decade, by which time the war raging between Britain and the American colonies would certainly have ensured that they were closely guarded documents. Hence, according to Furneaux, the inescapable conclusion is that whoever buried the charts that were discovered in 1912 had access to the Des Barres chart of Mahone Bay and merely added his own directions to mark the location of the Money Pit (*his* Money Pit, it follows). Wilkins had blithely reproduced these directions and the island shaped like Oak Island in his book on Captain Kidd, thereby adding confusion to genuine mystery – the mystery of who buried what on Oak Island. (There is a further mystery: the island in the Kidd-Palmer charts bears an unnerving resemblance to Oak Island; this is inexplicable.)

In his book Furneaux claimed to have worked out a plausible solution to the mystery, and he reasons his case carefully, sifting the known from the speculative, weighing the likely against the improbable. As he sees it, everything points in one direction.

Furneaux ridiculed the commonly held notion that the Money Pit and its elaborate defences were the work of pirates – the

redoubtable Kidd or any of his ilk. First, the idea that pirates went around burying treasure chests is largely a fiction; it runs counter to the 'live for today' mentality of thieves in general and pirates in particular. Crews of pirate ships were paid on a share basis and on the nail, since, like all seamen, they demanded the right to squander their hard-earned money in time-honoured pursuits at the end of the voyage. Why would they help their captain to hide the spoils on some remote island to which they would, in all likelihood, never return?

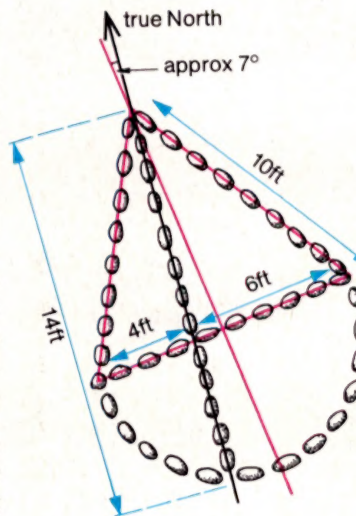
This argument is mere conjecture, but it makes a great deal of sense. Even more telling is Furneaux's contention that to ascribe to pirate riff-raff a scheme so brilliant in conception and so masterful in execution is simply ludicrous. According to one authority whom Furneaux consulted, the tunnelling operation would have taken 100 disciplined men, working in three shifts, six months to accomplish. Whoever it was who directed them in this back-breaking enterprise, he was a trained engineer of outstanding quality.

Finally, there is the date of construction, which has already been mentioned in connection with the sapling oaks. If Furneaux was right that whoever did the job must have access to the Des Barres chart (which means that the work was undertaken some time after the mid 1770s), then pirates are ruled out virtually on that score alone, since their halcyon days in the Caribbean and along the Atlantic coast were long gone by that time.

### A most important clue

So, if pirates were not responsible for the Money Pit, then who did build it? And how? And why? According to Furneaux, the date of construction provides the most important clue; he worked out an ingenious method for pinpointing that date. He reasoned that one of the many problems facing the mysterious mastermind was how to ensure that his tunnellers, working inland from Smith's Cove, kept on a straight line so as to run smack into the Money Pit. That line is 14° south of the true east-west line. Surely, according to Furneaux, he would have given his men, who were presumably working in dim light deep underground, one of the clearly marked cardinal points of the compass (west). If so, the magnetic variation west of north at the time must have been 14°. The magnetic values for Nova Scotia go back to 1750 and can be estimated for much earlier periods. It is thought that Oak Island would have recorded that particular variation in about 1611. It seems pretty certain that it did so in 1780.

Who would have wanted to conceal something of great value on Oak Island in 1780? The answer lies in the world around Oak Island in that year. General Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of the British forces in America, had been installed in his



Top: the course plotted by Gilbert Hedden and Frederick Blair (who was still acting as unofficial adviser to operations on Oak Island), following the directions on Harold Wilkins's map. This led to the discovery of a triangle of stones (above) embedded in the soil beneath a dense tangle of undergrowth, and within the triangle was an arrow – pointing directly at the Money Pit

headquarters at New York for two years. The year of his appointment, 1778, witnessed France's entry into the war on the side of the colonists, and the combined threat to New York from the French fleet and Washington's army was very real. Clinton's fall-back position, should he have had to evacuate New York, was Halifax, about 40 miles (64 kilometres) north of Oak Island. Is it not reasonable to suppose, asked Furneaux, that at some point during these perilous years Clinton may have seized on the idea of removing to a safe place some of the huge quantities of specie (money for the conduct of the war) in his keeping? If so, an island in Mahone Bay, which was en route should he have had to fall back on Halifax, would make sense. Moreover, a friend and colleague of Clinton's, John Montrésor, had surveyed Mahone Bay some years earlier. Perhaps Montrésor suggested the site.

So, according to this theory, some time around 1780 a contingent of British sappers,

#### Further reading

Rupert Furneaux, *Money Pit: the mystery of Oak Island*, Fontana 1976  
Jeremy Kingston, *Mysterious happenings*, Aldus 1978



Top: Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of the British forces in America from 1778 to 1782, who may have been responsible for the Money Pit. According to one theory, Clinton ordered his miners and engineers (above) to build the pit as a hiding place for some of the war funds in his keeping

Right: tourists listen to the story of the Money Pit, of the generations of hopeful prospectors who searched for what they believed to be a fortune at the bottom of the pit – and of the mystery that still surrounds it

led by an unknown engineer of rare genius, descended on Oak Island and performed their great work. The shattering implication of this for generations of treasure seekers is that the money, if it was actually deposited there (the hiding place could have formed part of a contingency plan that was not put into operation), must have been recovered by those who had hidden it, since there is no record of Clinton's having to explain away a few missing millions when he returned to England.

How could such a recovery have been effected, given the Money Pit's fool-proof system of flooding? For years searchers had tried in vain to locate flood gates, which they reckoned the designer must have installed to enable him to shut off the water when he returned. A blind alley, according to Furneaux – and so, in effect, was the Money Pit itself. Furneaux suggests that after the Money Pit and the tunnels had been dug (but not connected), one or more branch tunnels were run outwards and upwards from the Money Pit; at the end of those upward-reaching tunnels, probably not far beneath the surface of the ground, the treasure was concealed. Then the Money pit was filled in, the flood tunnels were connected to it, and the treasure was thereby completely safeguarded. Only he who knew its precise location could find it (and perhaps he could do so without bothering to excavate the Money Pit). All others would flounder in the watery swamp of the Money Pit forever.

It must be admitted that this solution to the puzzle has a weightiness about it that is alien to the old skull-and-crossbones tradition. But before assenting to it too quickly, it is appropriate to ask whether it accounts for all the evidence. How, for example, does it make sense of the metal objects encountered by the drilling operations of 1849 and 1897? And what about that piece of parchment with the tantalising inscription 'v.i.'?



# The classic case of 'Mary Celeste'

The abrupt disappearance of *Mary Celeste*'s entire crew is one of the most fascinating mysteries of the sea. But, as PAUL BEGG points out, that was only the climax of a long history of weird misfortunes

ON 5 DECEMBER 1872 a crewman on watch on board the British ship *Dei Gratia* sighted a vessel that seemed to be in distress. Three seamen lowered the *Dei Gratia*'s small boat and rowed across to the troubled craft to offer assistance. They hauled themselves over the ship's rails and dropped onto the deck; save for the sound of the wind in the sails and the eerie creaking of the ship's timbers, there was not a sound. The seamen searched the ship from stem to stern and found her to be in excellent condition, but there was not a soul on board. Her crew had disappeared. The name of the ship was *Mary Celeste*.

The disappearance of her crew is the central element in *Mary Celeste*'s long history of misfortune. She attracted bad luck like a magnet attracts iron filings. The superstitious would call her jinxed, and *Mary Celeste*'s story is one that would make even a hard-boiled sceptic agree that the superstitious might have a point.

*Mary Celeste* was built in 1860, the maiden venture of a consortium of pioneer shipbuilders at the shipyards of Joshua Dewis on Spencer's Island, Nova Scotia. She was originally christened *Amazon* and was launched in 1861, the year that saw the start of the American Civil War. Tragedy struck a short while later when her first skipper, a Scot named Robert McLellan, fell ill and died. Then one John Nutting Parker assumed command and skippered the *Amazon*'s maiden voyage, but she ran into a fishing weir off Maine, received a large gash in her hull and had to go to the shipyards for repair. While she was there a fire broke out amidships, bringing Captain Parker's short-lived command to an end.

*Amazon*'s first Atlantic crossing went without mishap until she entered the Straits of Dover and collided with a brig. The brig sank, *Amazon* again went for repairs, and her third skipper went to seek another command.

Following the necessary repairs and the appointment of a new captain, *Amazon* returned to America, and she promptly ran aground off Cow Bay, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

*Amazon*'s history now becomes a little hazy. She was pulled off the rocks and repaired, but appears to have passed from

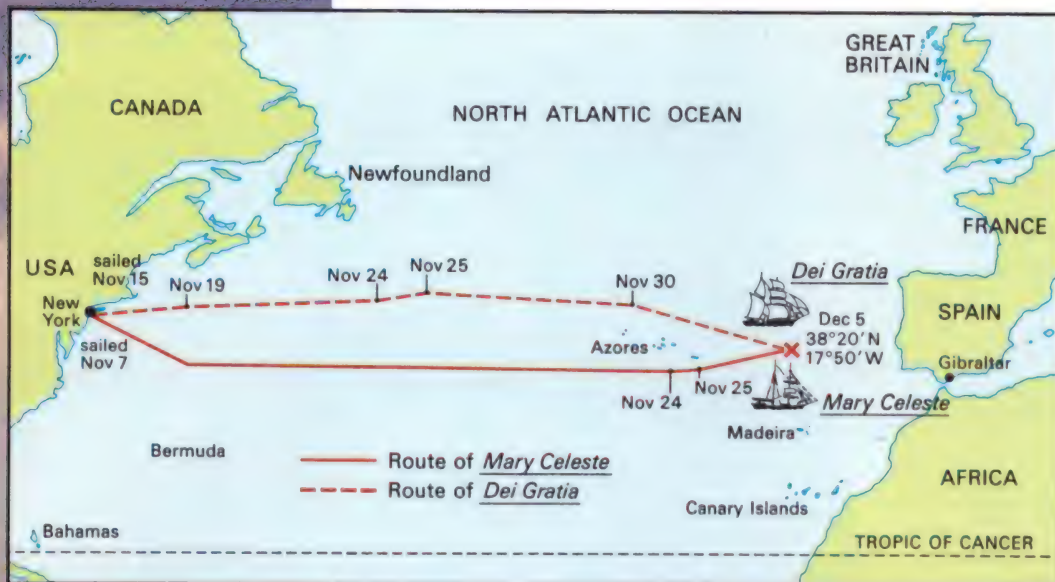
Right: the *Mary Celeste*, the Nova Scotian half-brig whose name is synonymous with the most bizarre kind of disappearance



Above: J. H. Winchester, one of the owners of the hapless sailing ship that eventually became the *Mary Celeste*

Below: the *Amazon*, built in 1860 in Nova Scotia. Until she became the *Mary Celeste* a few years later, her short career was 'unlucky'; but afterwards it was disastrous





Left: map showing the respective routes of the *Dei Gratia* and the *Mary Celeste* during November and December 1872. X marks the spot where the crew of the *Dei Gratia* sighted the bedraggled sailing ship, apparently becalmed and showing no sign of life

one owner to another, several of whom seem to have gone bankrupt and none of whom derived any good from their contact with the ship. She eventually passed into the hands of J.H. Winchester and Co., a consortium of New York shipowners. By this time the *Amazon* was unrecognisable as the vessel that had left the shipyards of Joshua Dewis. She had been enlarged, now flew the Stars and Stripes, and on her nameboard was *Mary Celeste*. It has been suggested that the peculiar mixture of English and French names was the result of the painter's error, the intended name being *Mary Sellers* or even perhaps *Marie Celeste*, the name, ironically, by which most people know her.

Sometime during late September or early October in 1872 *Mary Celeste* was berthed at Pier 44 in New York's East River, preparing to take on a new cargo and a fresh crew.

#### Benjamin Spooner Briggs

The latest captain of *Mary Celeste* was a stern, puritan New Englander named Benjamin Spooner Briggs. He was born at Wareham, Massachusetts, on 24 April 1835, the second of five sons born to Captain Nathan Briggs and his wife Sophia. It was a seafaring family; apart from his father, four of his brothers also went to sea. Two became master mariners at an early age, one of them being Benjamin Briggs, who had already commanded the schooner *Forest King*, the barque *Arthur*, and the brigantine *Sea Foam*. In later years many authors painted him as weak and ineffectual, a man whose religious beliefs had become a form of perversion, a mania, turning his strict abstinence from alcohol – which went so far as to allow none on board his ship unless it were cargo – into something akin to over-zealous morality. Briggs was in fact a man of strict beliefs and religious convictions, and although he was a teetotaler he was no monomaniac on the subject. He was described by those who knew him as always bearing 'the highest

character as a Christian and as an intelligent and active shipmaster'. He was also a shareholder in the *Mary Celeste*.

The first mate was Albert G. Richardson. A soldier in the American Civil War, he had married a niece of James H. Winchester's and had served before with Captain Briggs. He seems to have been trustworthy and competent and was held in high esteem.

Andrew Gilling was the second mate. His birthplace was given as New York but he seems to have been of Danish extraction. Again there is no reason to suspect that he was other than upright and honest.

The cook and steward, Edward William Head, hailed from Brooklyn, New York, where it is said that he was respected by all.

The remainder of the crew consisted of four seamen of German birth, about whom little is known except that two of them – both named Lorenzen – had lost all their possessions when shipwrecked prior to signing on as crewmen on *Mary Celeste*. None of these Germans appears to have been anything other than of good character.

Also making the voyage into the unknown were Captain Briggs's wife, Sarah Elizabeth – the daughter of the preacher of the Congregational Church in Marion, Massachusetts – and one of their two children, two-year-old Sophia Matilda. The elder child, their son Arthur Stanley, remained at home.

Late on Saturday, 2 November 1872 *Mary Celeste*'s cargo was loaded and made secure. She carried 1701 barrels of denatured alcohol being shipped by Meissner Ackerman and Co., merchants of New York, to H. Mascarenhas and Co., of Genoa, Italy.

Early on 5 November the Sandy Hook pilot ship towed *Mary Celeste* from Pier 44 to the lower bay off Staten Island, New York. The Atlantic was particularly stormy for the time of year and Briggs was forced to drop anchor for two days before he dared to venture out to sea on 7 November. But although *Mary Celeste* herself would make

## Mary Celeste

many more voyages, it was the last time anyone would see this particular crew.

On 15 November 1872, eight days after *Mary Celeste* left New York, *Dei Gratia* set off with a cargo of petroleum bound for Gibraltar. Her skipper was a Nova Scotian named David Reed Morehouse and the first mate was Oliver Deveau. Both these men and the rest of *Dei Gratia*'s crew were highly able sailors – as later events were to prove – and no 'dirt' has ever been attached to their characters except by sensationalists.

On 5 December, shortly after 1 p.m., one of the *Dei Gratia*'s crew, John Johnson, who was at the wheel, sighted a vessel about 5 miles (8 kilometres) off the port bow. Attracted by the poor state of the ship's sails and her slight 'yawing' (listing), he called the second mate, John Wright, and together they summoned Captain Morehouse. After surveying the vessel through his telescope, Morehouse gave orders to offer assistance.

At 3 p.m., having come within about 400 yards (370 metres) of the mystery ship, Morehouse hailed her several times, but, receiving no reply from her, he decided to send some men to investigate.

Oliver Deveau, with Wright and Johnson, rowed across to the distressed craft, noting as they drew closer, its name – *Mary Celeste*. Johnson was left in the boat as the other two hauled themselves over the ship's rails. The *Mary Celeste* was deserted.

Over the next hour Deveau and Wright searched *Mary Celeste* from stem to stern. The main staysail was found on the foreward house, but the foresail and upper foresail had been blown from the yards and lost. The jib, fore-topmast staysail and the fore lower topsail were set. The remaining sails were furled. Some of the running rigging was



fouled, some had been blown away, and parts of it were hanging over the sides. The main peak halyard – a stiff rope about 100 yards (90 metres) long used to hoist the outer end of the gaff sail – was broken and most of it missing. The wheel was spinning free and the binnacle had been knocked over and broken. The main hatch to below decks was well-battened down and secure, but certain of the hatch covers had apparently been removed and were found discarded near the hatchways. There was less than a foot (30 centimetres) of water in the galley and little of the six months' store of provisions had been spoilt. There was ample fresh water.

In short, *Mary Celeste* was in a far better condition than most vessels then regularly plying the Atlantic. And, aside from some evidence that she had recently weathered a storm, she bore no clues as to why she had been so abruptly abandoned by her crew.

On a table in Captain Briggs's cabin Oliver Deveau found the temporary log. It read: 'Monday, 25th. At five o'clock made island of St Mary's bearing ESE. At eight o'clock Eastern point bore SSW six miles [3 kilometres] distant.'

In the mate's cabin Deveau found a chart showing the track of the vessel up to 24 November.

Missing from the ship were the chronometer, sextant, bill of lading, navigation book, and a small yawl, or boat, that had been lashed to the main hatch. A piece of railing running alongside had been removed to launch the boat. This at least answered the mystery of where *Mary Celeste*'s crew had gone; they had abandoned ship. But why? What possible reason could an experienced seaman like Benjamin Spooner Briggs have had for abandoning a perfectly seaworthy

Top left: Captain Benjamin Spooner Briggs, master of the *Mary Celeste*. A puritan and abstemious New Englander, his alleged religious fanaticism has been blamed for whatever disaster hit the crew – mutiny or madness perhaps

Top right: Briggs's wife, Sarah Elizabeth who, with their two-year-old daughter Sophia Matilda, also sailed on the fatal voyage

Above: the first mate, Albert G. Richardson, who had served before under Briggs and was deemed an excellent seaman

Left: the ship's list, giving the names of those who sailed – and were doomed to vanish without trace

STATE OF NEW YORK, ss. I, *W. H. Woodruff*, Clerk of the Court of Sessions, do hereby certify that the following is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears in the files of the Court of Sessions, at New York, this 27th day of November, 1872.

W. H. Woodruff, Clerk of the Court of Sessions, New York.

Reprinted from the original in the National Archives (Records of the Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Customs), Washington, D.C.

LIST OF PERSONS									
COMPANY THE NEW YORK & ALBANY STEAMSHIP CO. <i>Mary Celeste</i> New York									
Name	Rank or Station	Place of Birth	Age	Color	Complexion	Height	Weight	Build	Remarks
Alfred H. Cushman	Master	New York	44	W	Fair	5' 7"	140	Slender	Single
Andrew Gilling	First Mate	New York	35	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
Edw. W. Drake	Second Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Third Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
Henry H. Brown	Fourth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
Henry H. Brown	Fifth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Sixth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Seventh Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Eighth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Ninth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single
William H. Brown	Tenth Mate	New York	28	W	Fair	5' 8"	140	Slender	Single

ship and loading his wife and two-year-old daughter and the seven members of crew into a small and comparatively unstable boat? Abandoning ship is a desperate measure, an act taken only when there is no alternative; yet as one of *Dei Gratia*'s crew said later, *Mary Celeste* was in a fit enough state to sail around the world. So why was she abandoned?

Under international maritime law anyone who salvages an abandoned vessel is entitled to a percentage of what the vessel and its cargo are worth. Generally such a vessel is a wreck, but *Mary Celeste*, a seaworthy ship, and her valuable cargo were worth a substantial sum, and the salvors could expect to make perhaps as much as \$80,000. Captain Morehouse was not consumed by avarice, as many subsequent writers have implied, and was actually reluctant to lay claim to *Mary Celeste*. He could not really spare the men to form a skeleton crew without both vessels being undermanned and therefore at risk in the event of an emergency; but he was eventually persuaded by Deveau.

Deveau and two seamen, Augustus Anderson and Charles Lund, took only two days to restore *Mary Celeste* to order, and then the two ships set off for Gibraltar. *Dei Gratia* arrived on the evening of 12 December and *Mary Celeste* the following morning. Within two hours of dropping anchor *Mary Celeste* was placed under arrest by Thomas J. Vecchio, of the Vice-Admiralty Court.

The Attorney General for Gibraltar and Advocate General for the Queen in Her Office of Admiralty was an excitable, arrogant and pompous bureaucrat named Frederick Solly Flood; he found the abandonment of *Mary Celeste* explicable only as a result of murder and piracy. Without Solly Flood the

Below: Captain David Reed Morehouse, master of the *Dei Gratia* (bottom). Under maritime law anyone who salvages an abandoned ship is entitled to a handsome percentage of its total worth. In the case of *Mary Celeste* this would have been considerable for she was in excellent condition and had her full complement of cargo. However, Morehouse was reluctant to lay any such claim and found it hard to spare crew to look after *Mary Celeste*. Yet some critics still maintain that Briggs and Morehouse were conspirators, who, having set up the 'disappearances', planned to split the salvage money between them – and live in luxury



Oliver Deveau, first mate of the *Dei Gratia*, who, with only two other crewmen, brought the *Mary Celeste* into Gibraltar in December 1872. The British authorities refused to believe their story of how they had discovered *Mary Celeste*



*Mary Celeste* mystery would have probably faded into obscurity, but his accusations at the hearings in the Vice-Admiralty Court attracted worldwide publicity.

First, Flood accused *Mary Celeste*'s original crew – in their absence – of having gained access to the cargo of alcohol and having murdered Captain Briggs, his wife and child, and Mate Richardson in a drunken fury. It is a theory that has been proposed several times since, once by William A. Richard, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, in an open letter published on the front page of the *New York Times* in 1873. The fact remains that the cargo was denatured alcohol and liable to give the drinker acute pains long before he could become intoxicated. Flood was forced to abandon his theory.

He next suggested that Briggs and Morehouse were conspirators. Briggs, said Flood, killed his crew and disposed of their bodies. He then took the lifeboat to a destination prearranged with Captain Morehouse, who in the meantime would have found *Mary Celeste* abandoned, taken her to Gibraltar and claimed the salvage reward. The two men would then meet and split their ill-gotten gains. This theory is just plausible, but there was and is no evidence that Briggs or Morehouse were villains. Moreover, Briggs was part-owner of *Mary Celeste* and his cut of the salvage money would not have been more than his investment in the vessel. Flood abandoned this idea too.

### Guilty until proved innocent

His third suggestion was that Captain Morehouse and the crew of *Dei Gratia* had boarded *Mary Celeste* and savagely slaughtered all on board. Flood tried very hard to make his claim stick, but all he succeeded in doing was generating an atmosphere of suspicion in which Morehouse and his crew would be considered guilty until they could prove themselves innocent. Fortunately, the Vice-Admiralty Court denounced such a flagrant abuse of the law and cleared Morehouse and his crew of any suspicion. They granted them a salvage reward of £1700. In the opinion of many people the award should have been twice or three times as much.

*Mary Celeste* was returned to James H. Winchester and, under the command of Captain George W. Blatchford, she continued her voyage to Genoa and finally delivered her cargo. Winchester then sold the ship – it is rumoured at a considerable loss – and over the next 12 years the vessel changed hands no less than 17 times. None of her new owners had a good word to say about her. She lurched up and down the coast of the United States losing cargoes, sails and sailors, running aground and catching fire with depressing regularity. It seemed that *Mary Celeste*'s jinx was there to stay.

What really happened to *Mary Celeste*? See page 994 for some bizarre theories

# The Elixir of Life

One of the aims of the alchemist's work was the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life. BRIAN INNES describes one alchemist who was rumoured to have succeeded

'ALWAYS DRUNK AND ALWAYS LUCID' was how a biographer described Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, who gave himself the name 'Paracelsus'. His career included the study of magic under Hans von Trittenheim at Würzburg in Germany, working for a year at the mining school of Sigismund Fugger, travelling through Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, England, Scandinavia and Russia, serving as an army surgeon in Italy and taking a medical degree at the University of Ferrara. He was appointed city physician of Basel, in Switzerland, in 1526, and he celebrated his appointment with a remarkable tirade in the city square.

In one hand he held a brass pan full of glowing coals. Into the fire he thrust the works of Avicenna, the 11th-century Arab philosopher, and of Galen, the second-century Greek medical authority. He sprinkled sulphur and saltpetre over them so that they were consumed in spectacular flames, and spoke:

If your physicians only knew that their prince Galen – they call none like him – was sticking in Hell, from whence he has sent letters to me, they would make

Above: alchemists grew old and decrepit in their quest for the Elixir of Life. Yet stories persist that some fortunate practitioners found some way to survive beyond their natural span

Below: Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, city physician of Basel, contributed much to alchemical theory, as well as to pharmacy



the sign of the cross upon themselves with a fox's tail. In the same way your Avicenna sits in the vestibule of the Infernal portal; and I have disputed with him about his . . . Tincture of the Philosophers, his Quintessence, and Philosopher's Stone . . . and all the rest. O you hypocrites, who despise the truths taught you by a great physician [he meant himself]. . . Come then, and listen, impostors who prevail only by the authority of your high positions! After my death, my disciples will burst forth and drag you to the light, and shall expose your dirty drugs, where-with up to this time you have compassed the death of princes. . .

In spite of his overweening, egotistical style, Paracelsus was an important influence in the development of the science of pharmacy. He was among the first to recognise that the processes of alchemy were the same as those of baking and cooking – he even dignified the man who lit and tended the fires with the title of 'alchemist'. And he replaced the four elements of Aristotle (see page 921) by three 'hypostatical principles': mercury, sulphur and salt. The term 'hypostatical' meant that

these were not the ordinary substances: they were, rather, three ideal substances, which a 17th-century text described in these terms:

*Mercury* is that sharp, permeating, ethereal and very pure fluid to which all nutrition, sense, motion, power, colours and retardation of age are due. It is derived from air and water; it is the food of life. . . .

*Sulphur* is that sweet, oleaginous and viscid [glutinous] balsam conserving the natural heat of the parts, instrument of all vegetation [unconscious activity of plants or animals, such as assimilating food], increase and transmutation, and the fountain and origin of all colours. It is inflammable, yet has great power of conglutinating [sticking together] extreme contraries.

*Salt* is that dry saline body preserving mixtures from putrefaction, having wonderful powers of dissolving, coagulating, cleansing, evacuating, conferring solidity, consistency, taste and the like. It resembles earth, not as being cold and dry, but as being firm and fixed.

Paracelsus saw these three principles in terms of spirit (mercury), soul (sulphur) and body (salt). As he himself put it in one of his alchemical writings:

But as there are many kinds of fruit, so there are many kinds of sulphur, salt and mercury. A different sulphur is in gold, another in silver, another in lead, another in iron, tin, etc. Also a different one in sapphire, another in the emerald, another in the ruby, chrysolite, amethyst, magnets, etc. Also



Two targets of the wrath of Paracelsus: the Greek writer Galen (above), an authority on drugs, and the Arab ibn Sina, known in Europe as Avicenna (below), author of *The canon of medicine*



another in stones, flint, salts, spring-waters, etc. . . .

This kind of thinking led Paracelsus to the search for the 'quintessence' of each material, the refined and purified extract that was the essential part of it. Supposedly he identified this with the 'mercury' specific to that substance. In his public speech in Basel he was contrasting the quintessences of various metals, which he had prepared by distillation, to common 'dirty drugs'.

### An innovation in alchemy

The concept of hypostatic mercury, sulphur and salt gave a new impetus to alchemical enquiry; and Paracelsus achieved apparent success in medical treatment with some of his 'quintessences'. They were probably weak acid solutions, pepped up in some instances with alcohol.

The ideas of Paracelsus also encouraged the search for the Elixir of Life. This remarkable substance, which supposedly conferred longevity or even immortality, had reputedly been discovered already. It was important in Chinese alchemy, the story of which will be told later (see page 985). In Europe alchemists were rumoured at various times to have gained immortality. One was Nicolas Flamel.

Flamel was a thrifty and industrious scrivener (a scribe and copyist) in 14th-century Paris. In 1357 he bought a very old and large illuminated book:

The cover of it was of brass, well bound, all engraved with letters or strange figures. . . . This I know that I could not read them nor were they either Latin or French letters. . . . As to

## What was the Philosopher's Stone?

Early philosophers were convinced that by lengthy processes of purification it must be possible to extract from minerals the natural 'principle' that supposedly caused gold to 'grow' in the earth. The anonymous 17th-century book *The sophic hydrolith* tells us that the Philosopher's Stone is prepared from a mineral by first 'purging it of all that is thick, nebulous, opaque and dark', yielding mercurial water or 'water of the Sun', which has a pleasant penetrating smell and is very volatile.

Part of this liquid is put on one side, and the rest mixed with one twelfth its weight of 'the divinely endowed body of gold' – ordinary gold being useless because it is defiled by daily use. The mixture forms a solid amalgam, which is then heated gently for a week. It is then dissolved in some of the mercurial water in an egg-shaped phial.

Then the remaining mercurial water



Gold had to be added to the Philosopher's Stone to make further gold. This is symbolised here by the lion devouring the serpent in order to transform it

is added gradually, in seven portions; the phial is sealed, and kept at such a temperature as will hatch an egg. After 40 days, the phial's contents will be as black as a raven's head; after seven more days small grainy bodies like fish-eyes appear.

The Philosopher's Stone begins to make its appearance: first reddish in colour; then white, green and yellow like a peacock's tail; then a dazzling white; and later a deep glowing red. Finally, 'the revived body is quickened, perfected and glorified' and appears of a most beautiful purple colour.

Gradually, over the centuries, alchemists came to identify the Philosopher's Stone with the Elixir, the substance that would confer eternal life.

As for the mineral from which the Stone was to be prepared, *Gloria mundi* (1526) says it is 'familiar to all men, both young and old, is found in the country, in the village, in the town. . . . No-one prizes it, though, next to the human soul, it is the most beautiful and most precious thing upon earth. . . .'



the matter that was written within, it was engraved (as I suppose) with an iron pencil or graver upon . . . bark leaves, and curiously coloured. . . .

On the first page was written in golden letters: 'Abraham the Jew, Priest, Prince, Levite, Astrologer and Philosopher, to the Nation of the Jews dispersed by the Wrath of God in France, wisheth Health'. Flamel subsequently referred to this manuscript as 'the book of Abraham the Jew'. The dedication was followed by execrations against anyone who was neither priest nor scribe and who might read the book. As Flamel was a scribe, he was emboldened to read further.

The author intended to give the dispersed Jews assistance in paying their taxes to the Roman authorities by teaching them how to transmute base metals into gold. The instructions were clear and easy to follow, but unfortunately they referred only to the later stages of the process. The only guidance to the earlier stages was said to be in the illustrations given on the fourth and fifth leaves of the book. To his great disappointment, Flamel found that, although these pictures were well painted,

yet by that could no man ever have been able to understand it without being well skilled in their Qabalah, which is a series of old traditions, and also to have been well studied in their books.

For 21 years Flamel tried without success to find someone who could explain these pictures to him. At last his wife Perrenelle suggested that he should travel to Spain to seek out some learned Jew who could shed light on the matter. Flamel decided to make the famous pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Compostela; and so, with his pilgrim's staff and broad-brimmed hat, and carrying carefully made copies of the mysterious illustrations, he set out on foot.

When he had made his devotions at the shrine, he travelled on to the city of León, in northern Spain, where by chance he made the acquaintance of a certain Master Canches, a learned Jewish physician. When he saw the pictures, he was 'ravished with great astonishment and joy', recognising them as parts of a book that he had long believed lost. He made up his mind at once to return with Flamel to France. But at Orléans, wearied and old, he died. Flamel, having seen him buried, returned alone to Paris.

I had now the *prima materia*, the first principles, yet not their first preparation, which is a thing most difficult, above all things in the world. . . . Finally, I found that which I desired, which I also knew by the strong scent and odour thereof. Having this, I easily accomplished the Mastery. . . . The first time that I made projection [accomplished transmutation] was upon Mercury, whereof I turned half a pound [227 grams], or thereabouts,



Left and above left: two pages from an early copy of 'The book of Abraham the Jew' in Paris. The lower picture shows those who seek for gold in the garden; the figure at bottom right, if we may believe Ninian Bres, is Nicolas Flamel himself. In the upper picture, titled 'the three colours of the work', the rider mounted on a black lion represents gold in maceration; the second, on a red lion, represents the inner ferment; and the crowned rider on a white lion symbolises success

Left: a supposed portrait of Nicolas Flamel, from an early 19th-century work

Right: another picture from 'The book of Abraham the Jew'. This has been called 'the fair flower on the mountain'. The red and white flowers stand for stages in the Great Work, the dragons for sophic (that is, 'ideal') mercury, and the griffins for a combination of the lion (the fixed principle) and the eagle (the volatile principle)



Above: an 18th-century engraving of the frescoes that were painted for Flamel in the churchyard of the Holy Innocents in Paris, and which had survived for 400 years. A pair of small figures below the centre represent Flamel and his wife Perrenelle, while the panels at the top show seven of the illustrations from 'The book of Abraham the Jew'. Numerous copies of these pictures were made over the centuries, and it is now very difficult to determine what was in the original



into pure silver, better than that of the Mine, as I myself assayed, and made others assay many times. This was upon a Monday, the 17th of January about noon, in my home, Perrenelle only being present, in the year of the restoring of mankind 1382.

Three months later Flamel made his first transmutation into gold. He and Perrenelle put their new-found wealth to good use: they endowed

fourteen hospitals, three chapels and seven churches, in the city of Paris, all which we had new built from the ground, and enriched with great gifts and revenues, with many reparations in their churchyards. We also have done at Boulogne about as much as we have done at Paris, not to speak of the charitable acts which we both did to particular poor people, principally to widows and orphans. . . .

After Flamel's death in 1419 the rumours began. Hoping that the Philosopher's Stone might still be hidden in one of his houses, people searched through them again and again, until one was reduced to a pile of rubble. There were stories that both Perrenelle and Nicolas were still alive; that she had gone to live in Switzerland while he buried a log in her grave, and that later he did the same at his own 'funeral'.

In the centuries since, legends have persisted that the wealthy alchemist had defeated death. The 17th-century traveller Paul Lucas, while travelling in Asia Minor, met a distinguished Turkish philosopher. He was told that

true philosophers had had the secret of prolonging life for anything up to a thousand years. . . . At last I took the liberty of naming the celebrated Flamel, who, it was said, possessed the Philosopher's Stone, yet was certainly dead. He smiled at my simplicity, and asked with an air of mirth: Do you really believe this? No, no, my friend, Flamel is still living; neither he nor his wife has yet tasted death. It is not above three years since I left both . . . in India; he is one of my best friends.

### A couple who cheated death

In 1761 Flamel and his wife were said to have attended the opera in Paris. Still later there were stories very reminiscent of those concerning the Count St Germain, who was also supposed to have discovered the Elixir of Life (see page 138). What are we to make of that almost unknown work *Le corbeau menteur* (*The lying raven*) by the 19th-century writer Ninian Bres?

He was a little less than middle height, stooping somewhat with the weight of years, but still with a firm step and a clear eye, and with a complexion strangely smooth and transparent, like fine alabaster. Both he and the woman with him – clearly his wife, although she appeared almost imperceptibly the older and more decisive of the two – were dressed in a style that seemed only a few years out of fashion and yet had an indefinable air of antiquity about it. I stood, half-concealed in a little archway toward the end of the Boulevard du Temple: my hands were stained with acid, and my topcoat stank of the furnace. As the couple came abreast of the spot where I stood, Flamel turned toward me and seemed about to speak, but Perrenelle drew him quickly on, and they were almost at once lost in the crowd. You ask how I am so confident that this was Nicolas Flamel? I tell you that I have spent many hours in the Bibliothèque Nationale, poring over the book of Abraham the Jew: look carefully at the first side of the fifth leaf and there, in the lower right-hand corner of the representation of those who seek for gold in the garden, you will see the face that searched mine that evening on the Boulevard du Temple, and that has haunted my dreams ever since. . . .

*Was the search for eternal life merely a symbolic quest, or did it have sexual meanings as well? See page 985*

# Analysing the French timeslips



**Were events from the past really experienced by two pairs of English ladies on holiday in France 50 years apart?**  
**JOAN FORMAN** sums up the evidence for and against the alleged timeslips at Versailles and Dieppe

THE EXPERIENCES OF Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain at Versailles in 1901 and of Mrs and Miss Norton at Puys, near Dieppe, in 1951 appear similar in some respects. Both experiences occurred to two Englishwomen; the women in each case were on holiday together in France; the month in which both experiences occurred was August.

But here the parallels end. Moberley's and Jourdain's experience was both auditory and visual, whereas the Nortons' was wholly auditory. Furthermore, at Versailles the two women not only spoke to the people they saw but received replies from them (from the gentleman who directed them to the house, for instance, and from the footman who volunteered to show them the way). By contrast, Agnes and Dorothy Norton were simply an audience; they played no active part in the unseen drama that was being enacted beyond their balcony.

Was either experience paranormal? Let us look at the facts again.

Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain seem to have had no clear idea of what they would find at the Petit Trianon. They had some general knowledge of 18th-century French history and of Marie-Antoinette's life at Versailles, but their visit to the Queen's château at Versailles was prompted principally by the prospect of a pleasant walk

through the gardens on a warm afternoon.

As soon as they approached the Petit Trianon, their pleasure was marred; their sightseeing trip became less attractive than they had anticipated. The two women felt oppressed and disorientated. They had difficulty in finding their way through the woods and among the paths. The strangeness of the people they encountered – the man at the kiosk, the unseen runners, the gentleman, the footman, the lady with the fichu – added to their unease. Their account of the events of that afternoon, although it was written three months later, conveys something of their disquiet. It is quite straightforward, almost naïve. Had they had any intention to deceive, to invent a plausible story or to perpetrate an elaborate fraud, they would surely have taken much greater care over both their research and their experience. Indeed, their innocence and the lack of expertise that is evident from their subsequent investigations are convincing proof of the women's sincerity. They were clearly hoping to make sense of what they had experienced and trying to interpret the facts they had discovered about the Petit Trianon and its history in a way that would accord with the places and the people they had seen that afternoon. In the light of modern psychological research, this was not a wise undertaking,

Above: the Belvédère, one of the ornamental buildings in the grounds of the Petit Trianon at Versailles, which had been built at the time of Marie-Antoinette. Critics of the alleged timeslip experienced by Misses Moberley and Jourdain have assumed that this was in fact the 'kiosk' they described. But on her return visit to Versailles in 1902, Miss Jourdain dismissed this theory. She took note of the Belvédère – but still insisted it was not the kiosk, which she could no longer find



but the Versailles episode happened at the turn of the century, when the techniques of psychical research were less sophisticated than they are now.

Miss Moberley's and Miss Jourdain's record of their experience may not have been meticulous enough to convince sceptics, but many critics fell into the common trap of producing counter-explanations less credible than that of paranormality. Some claimed, for example, that the women had merely seen 20th-century figures and had imagined that they belonged to an earlier period. But the topography of the gardens – the bridge and the waterfall, certain areas of woodland – was quite different from that of Versailles in 1901. How could the people have been contemporary if the background was not?

To turn to the experience of Agnes and



Left: the combined operations raid on Dieppe by the Allies on 19 August 1942, and the resulting devastation of the holiday resort of Dieppe (above). Fifty years almost to the day after the Versailles timeslip, Agnes and Dorothy Norton claimed that their French holiday was also interrupted by the past – this time by the 'unmistakable' sounds of the Allied invasion. Because their experience was entirely auditory a number of alternative – natural – explanations have been put forward. But no one will ever be sure that the Nortons did not, as they claimed, have the paranormal experience of hearing the battle nine years after it took place

Dorothy Norton at Puys: they too had brought with them on their holiday only the most general knowledge of the history of the area. Yet for three hours they stood on their balcony listening to the sounds of an invisible battle raging on the beach at Dieppe, the details of which generally matched other accounts of the famous raid in 1942. Their experience is not unique: other observers have encountered re-enactments of battles fought long ago. Until comparatively recently, the sights and sounds of Marston Moor, the bloody clash between Roundheads and Cavaliers in the English Civil War, were regularly heard and seen near the battlefield. The author knows of two people who have accidentally walked into other ancient skirmishes.

### A sensitive issue

Critics made much of the discrepancies in the accounts of Dorothy and Agnes. They pointed out that the women had not mentioned the noises to each other when they first heard them, and they noted that the two women's records contained minor differences of chronology. However, two points should be noted in defence of the Nortons' accounts. First, it was Dorothy, and not Agnes, who was the acknowledged sensitive. Agnes may have acted as a medium, or channel, for Dorothy, and she may have been slower to respond to the stimulus of the sounds that had no apparent source. Second, no two people ever experience an event identically, particularly where an impression of time is involved. The accounts of two witnesses of any event rarely tally exactly.

There are more serious objections to be made to the Nortons' claim that their experience was paranormal. Critics have suggested several natural explanations for the noises they heard. The dredger at work in the harbour, for instance: was that the sound that disturbed them? The noise of a dredger is unmistakable: it is a regular, fluctuating sound, something between a groan and a drone. However, the noise is certainly not a 'roar', which is what Dorothy claimed she heard, and no dredger could reproduce the sounds of battle – 'gunfire', 'shellfire', 'dive-bombers', 'landing craft' and 'cries'. Once heard, the noise of dive-bombers is not forgotten. Landing craft, though? What noise do they produce that is identifiable, unambiguously, at a distance? This detail seemed to critics to be implausible – but it is possible that Agnes had become familiar with the noise when she was a member of the WRNS during the war. The noise of aircraft: was that simply the sound of civil airlines flying over Puys en route to Turin? Yet another sceptic suggested that the noise was produced by the abnormally high tide that washed over the beach at Puys that night – an unlikely explanation, since it would hardly account for the 'cries' and 'gunfire' of battle.

However, certain questions do remain



unanswered. The Nortons claimed that at the very time they were listening to the sound of the battle on the beach, they were aware that the noises probably had a paranormal source. This is most unusual. One of the striking facts about psychical experiences is that those involved rarely recognise them as such until later. Subjects often have a sense of unease and bewilderment while the events are taking place, but this may be accounted for by the fact that they are receiving information from two sources simultaneously: the senses, which are restricted by the confines of chronological time, and a paranormal source, which is subject to no such constraint. Furthermore, the onset of psychical experience often appears to be associated with the alpha brainwave pattern, the brain's 'neutral' gear, when the subject is not concentrating on anything in particular. The act of bringing concentration to bear on a paranormal experience generally causes the alpha pattern to be replaced by another, which rouses the subject out of the state in which he is likely to experience psychic phenomena. If Agnes and Dorothy Norton realised that what they were hearing had a paranormal source, it is curious that they did not 'emerge' from the experience immediately.

There is one other issue that has remained unresolved. On 30 July, a few days before the night on which the two women heard the sounds of the raid on Dieppe, Dorothy was

The battle of Marston Moor, fought on 2 July 1644, the first major royalist defeat of the English Civil War. There have been several cases recorded of people in the area of Marston Moor (a few miles from York) suddenly finding themselves surrounded by the sights and/or sounds of this battle, much as the Nortons seem to have experienced the Dieppe landings

awoken by a similar noise. She did not mention this fact to her sister-in-law. Was that because she did not regard that experience as paranormal? If not, why did she and Agnes conclude that the sounds they heard together so soon afterwards had a paranormal source?

The experience of Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain at Versailles appears to bear all the marks of a large-scale retrocognitive timeslip. The transposed landscape, the presence of people from another age, the exchanges that took place between the two 20th-century women and the people they met as they wandered through the woods and along the paths – all these suggest that for them time had become dislocated.

The Dieppe case is less clear-cut. It may have been a timeslip of a similar kind, though exclusively auditory and more restricted in scope. What throws doubt on the paranormality of the experience, curiously enough, is the additional detail supplied by Agnes, who provided a more precise record of what she had heard and who mentioned landing craft, in spite of the fact that it was Dorothy who was the psychic.

Is it ever possible to prove beyond doubt that an experience that revives past events is a paranormal one? It seems not, for even when several witnesses confirm a detailed account of the experience, someone is sure to suggest an hallucination or telepathy.

#### Further reading

Joan Forman, *The mask of time*, Macdonald and Jane's 1978  
 Lucille Iremonger, *The ghosts of Versailles*, Faber and Faber 1957  
 Landale Johnston, *The Trianon case*, Arthur H. Stockwell 1945  
 C. A. E. Moberley and E. F. Jourdain, *An adventure*, Faber and Faber 1931

*continued from back cover*

'Yes, good, that's the one I'm after. Were you ill long, love? "Well, it seemed a long time to me but looking back it was about six months."' (This was correct of course.) 'Who's Elizabeth?'

'My mum.'

'Well, she sends her love to Elizabeth.'

Jenny's mother is actually known as Betty – but it wasn't till later that Jenny discovered that she had been christened Betty, not Elizabeth.

Then came a flood of names that Jenny didn't immediately recognise: 'George Wright, she knew before they moved, and they moved twice . . . Eileen . . . Flo . . . Vi . . . Sid . . . Arthur . . . Ian and Claire . . . Elsie . . . Wyn – who's Wyn? . . . Kate . . . Mr and Mrs Johnson . . . Lil. . . ' All these, it turned out, were friends of Jenny's Nan. There were many other names that couldn't be confirmed, that no one connected with the Dawson family seems to recognise; neither did any of the rest of us in the room. But it's worth pointing out here that of the 90 or so names that Doris mentioned in the course of the sitting, some 29 were of friends or family. And some of the details were startling – one event in particular, private to Jenny, was described by Doris with stunning accuracy, complete with names and dates. Doris sometimes has to struggle to hear a name, as the 'vibration' comes and goes:

'Morris? Morrison? Mitchell? Mac? I'm guessing, that's no good to me. . . . Murray? No – *Malcolm!*' Doris's relief at getting it right at last was plain long before Jenny chimed in, 'That's my fiancé!'

### **Relatives and friends**

And more names came through: all relatives or friends that Jenny knew – her nephew Paul with auburn hair, a living friend who can't walk, uncle Sid, the black sheep of the family ('"Tututut," she's going at me love'), uncle Brian, Arthur, Douglas, some cousins who live just outside Sydney, Australia, Sharon, two Carols, Leslie and her daughter Lee. Jenny's father had been in the RAF, said Doris correctly, and confirmed Jenny's wedding planned for July. 'They'll all be there, dear. They all have their own lives to lead over there, but on special occasions they're always about.'

'Now I've got two Bills. No it isn't it's Bert, living. Oh, your grandmother gets very testy. "Now wait till I've finished, I didn't say Bill, I said Bert."' But she's a real Londoner, a real London voice. Now, somebody kept a shop . . . somebody lived at number 18.' Jenny's Nan had done both. 'Now I keep getting the most peculiar words in my head. What does the Green Man mean to you?'

'I don't believe . . . yes I do!' laughed Jenny. Well she might. She lives in Greenman Street – and on the corner is a pub called The Green Man. 'She's taking me up high, she's showing me a front room.

I'm facing the window. She's pulling me to the left. She's showing me a picture. Nasty. Take it down.' Jenny said she would – and did: a picture of an old man pouring water into a skull, which was hanging in her living room – on the left of the window – at home.

'Colin? Col? Is there a Catherine? No . . . Now she's met Mrs Collins. You should remember Mrs Collins,' she said.

'If it's the same Mrs Collins, she should be able to tell me what pet she had.'

'It talks to me. It's a *parrot!* She said "What do you mean? I *can* bloody well tell her. You want proof, I'll give her proof girl!" And I could hear the parrot talking!' Then, changing the subject, Doris went on: 'And she bought some new glasses. She said "I never wore them, hardly. Should've saved some money there."'

Jenny laughed: her Nan had done nothing but grumble about those glasses – even if she had got them on the National Health. And so the details kept coming: how the family used to go down to Southend together, how Nan passed over without her teeth in (perhaps not surprisingly), how Jenny, in her days on a local paper, had written a problem page – even that her real name is Jeanette.

Then, after nearly an hour and a half, the 'power' began to fade, and only a mass of odd and confused details came through. The sitting was over.

### **No doubt about Doris**

Whatever else, there is no doubt about the genuineness of Doris Stokes herself. Too many details were so accurately given – though some were, it is true, quite inaccurate: a friend's car *did* have a dangerous defect in the nearside rear wheel, but it wasn't light blue; no one working on our sister publication *The Movie* has died of a heart attack; Jenny wasn't temporarily distracted from her fiancé by another young man!

While there is no question at all of fraud, it is noticeable that all the information Doris gave was known to Jenny already, or could have been picked up and forgotten. Was she in some way reading Jenny's mind? 'No dear – Jenny wasn't thinking of the things I said, were you?' No, but perhaps the details were picked up from the memory, by some form of ESP?

'No – that would scare me,' said Doris. 'If I thought that, I wouldn't do it any more. Because that would be an invasion of somebody's privacy, wouldn't it. I don't think God would allow that.' Besides, as she pointed out, people come through who have no connection at all with the person present – and even when only Doris is there. As happened, it turned out, the next day. Doris rang Jenny: 'I've had your grandmother here in the kitchen this morning and she told me off. Your mother's name isn't Elizabeth – it's Betty, isn't it?'

# A visit from Doris Stokes

'That was Doris Fisher Stokes on the line,' grinned someone across *The Unexplained* office. 'She's just called to say our article [see page 441, issue 23] was the best on her work she's ever seen. And she'd like to do a sitting for one of us.'

The choice was obvious: Jenny Dawson had lost her grandmother only six months or so before and was keen to see if Doris could get in touch. Besides, it gave the sceptical among us the chance to see a world-famous clairaudient at work and assess her accuracy. When she arrived a few weeks later to meet us, the first to be surprised was our editor himself: 'This is your second career, isn't it, love,' Doris remarked brightly – and with unprompted accuracy. (Peter Brookesmith once had a fairly successful career as an advertising copywriter.) Over lunch she told us about her life as a star and about her new book; how she was taken one night to see the afterlife, an experience she describes in detail in *More voices in my ear*; and from time to time she would let out odd flashes of intuition. 'That's a new one, that,' she said at one point, looking at Jenny's engagement ring. As indeed it was: the other, once lost, is now on Jenny's other hand. No one mentioned Jenny's Nan. The overriding impression one had was of just what Doris has always claimed to be: an ordinary, down-to-earth person with a rather motherly Northern warmth – and an unusual talent that she herself seems to find quite matter-of-course.

So much so that Doris was not at all bothered when the rest of *The Unexplained* staff crowded into the Orbis House conference room to hear her. We sat chattering until Doris gathered herself up and said, 'Now let's see what we can do.' A long silence followed as she pressed her hand against her forehead in concentration.

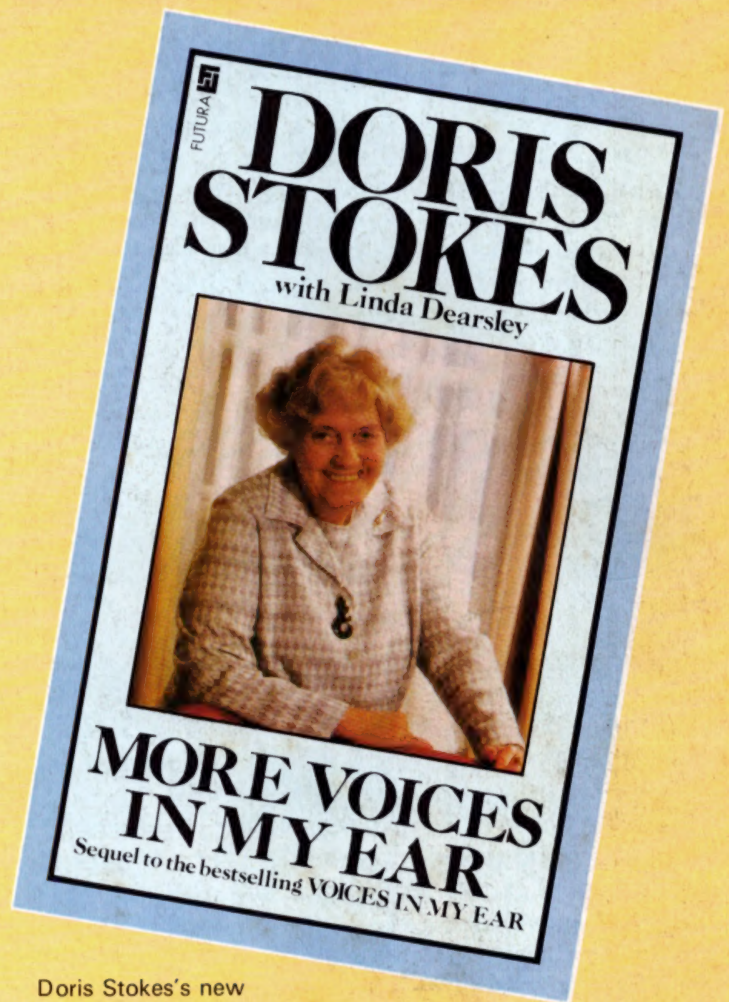
## Contact with the other side

'A little light I saw, it's someone belonging, isn't it. Because I'm getting that feeling of belonging and I think it's under a year because the light comes on and goes off again.' She opened her eyes to look at Jenny. 'I must hear your voice love. Because I'm a clairaudient – and I must hear your voice vibration. Because whoever it is, I can't quite make it out yet. They aren't quite sure what's going on, at all. It takes them a little while, they wander about the place and I lose them and then I have to get them back.'

Then, suddenly: 'Now, who's John, living? It could be Joan.'

'There is a Joan but I don't know all that much about her,' said Jenny.

'I don't know why they gave me that, there must be a reason. It's not an old voice I'm hearing. Voices do



Doris Stokes's new book is available now

change when they get over, that's the point. Who had cancer of the lung, I've got a voice coming in.'

Then we knew we were on to something.

'My grandmother,' answered Jenny, breathless.

'She's over, love. She said, "Maybe my voice has changed dear, you see I had cancer of the lung." Did you smoke love? "Never."'

Jenny said later: 'She used to smoke all right – in secret! But she stopped when she was 60 – she hadn't smoked for 25 years before she died.' At the sitting, Jenny just giggled, knowingly.

'Who's Anne?' asked Doris abruptly.

'That's my aunt.'

'Well she's been going to the hospital, not *in* a hospital but *to* a hospital.'

Aunt Anne in fact lives in New York. When Jenny telephoned her afterwards she confirmed she had indeed been going to a 'medical center' to have high blood pressure treated.

'Is this the one that's just gone over?' asked Doris.

*continued overleaf*